



Why Dora Left: Freud and the Master Discourse

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ABSTRACT


The question of why Dora left her treatment before it was brought to a satisfactory end and the equally important question of why Freud chose to publish this problematic and fragmentary story have both been dealt with at great length by Freud's successors. Dora has been read by analysts, literary critics, and not least by feminists.

The aim of this paper is to point out the position Freud took toward his patient. Dora stands out as the one case among Freud's 5 great case stories that has a female protagonist, and reading the case it becomes clear that Freud stumbled because of an unresolved problem toward femininity, both Dora's and his own. In Dora, it is argued, Freud took a new stance toward the object of his investigation, speaking from the position of the master. Freud presents himself as the one who knows, in great contrast to the position he takes when unraveling the dream. Here he is the humble scholar giving evidence of a great tolerance for not-knowing. These 2 positions run through Freud's writings from "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900b) to "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937a). From the Dora case a line can be drawn to Freud's metaphor of the bedrock of castration, the unsurpassable barrier to both analytical work and the theory of sex and gender.

Introduction

Among Freud's five case stories, Dora's stands out as probably the most discussed and critiqued by his successors.¹ Considering the huge number of contributions from both psychoanalysts and literary and feminist scholars, it might seem futile to return once more to Dora. However, the aim of this paper is not so much to add new points of view to the many interpretations given to the Dora case as to consider it from the point of view of the discourse Freud was deploying. I read Freud's text as the breakthrough of a new stance Freud took toward the object of his investigation, speaking here as the master (Lacan, 1953–1954, 1985; Verhaeghe, 1999; Mahoney, 2005, Cottet, 2012). Beginning with this case, Freud positions himself as the master of knowledge—especially the knowledge of sexuality—while pointing to the imminent breakdown of this illusory idea of mastery when he investigates the traces of the unconscious.

When he wrote down the Dora case Freud (1900b) had finished his major work "The Interpretation of Dreams" and had abandoned his theory that traumatic seduction caused hysteria. In the years to follow Freud slowly left behind his search for an answer to the riddle of hysteria and the dream and turned to a period of didactic expositions; from 1904 to 1917 he published more than 20 essays (Verhaeghe, 1999). Freud's writings during this period all have a character of completeness and wholeness, exposing to the reader a foundation of psychoanalytic knowledge of which the author was the sovereign master. The historical overviews also published during those years add to the

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¹See Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (1985) and Joseph Lichtenberg (2005) for skilled interpretations of Freud's text, clinical as well as literary.

impression that the creator of psychoanalysis had reached his goal of crafting a self-contained scholarly unit.

One of the most repeated questions of the Dora case concerns precisely that of knowledge, whether it is essentially fragmentary or whole. This signals Freud's ambition to be the master figure while pointing to the threat that emanates from the object he imagines he is mastering. The duality of this maneuver will be the leading figure in my reading of Dora. Whereas the Freud of "Studies on Hysteria" (1895) and "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900b) presented himself as a seeker of hidden truths who exposes a huge material to the reader, the Freud of the Dora case presented his readers with only a summary of his results, leaving out his technique and—to a large degree—his patient's comments. As Jacqueline Rose (1985) noticed, the process, although there, is elided and although an interpretation is given it is not adequate. Thus, it was not coincidental that Freud decided to change the title of his paper from "Dreams and Hysteria" to "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905a), for in the Dora case, Freud took a new stance toward the object of his science. In his work with Dora he took a shortcut and insisted on the oedipal character of her libidinal longings. Revenge was not long in coming. Dora slammed the door and left after only 3 months of analysis, echoing the gesture of her near namesake Nora—the heroine of Henrik Ibsen's (1879) play *A Doll's House*.

In what follows I read the Dora case as an illustration of a double discourse running through the entirety of Freud's writings. I start with Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" (1900b), continue with the story of Dora, and finish with two of Freud's last texts, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937a) and "Constructions in Analysis" (1937b), to demonstrate two very different positions Freud assumed toward the objects of his studies. In the one he is the omniscient researcher and narrator, in the other the humble scholar giving evidence of a great tolerance for not-knowing. Although most of Freud's successors have pointed to his failure to help Dora due to his blindness to Dora's transference—which Freud himself was the first to accept—I point to his position as the omniscient master. Assuming the position of the master, Freud followed his "passion for origin" (Cottet, 2012). He aimed to find an original core, the moment of historical truth, missing from the patient's story, in order to create a whole and completed story out of the fragment of life and suffering, the patient was able to narrate. This discourse of mastery, however, seemed from time to time to collapse forcing Freud to realize that there might not be any kernel or final truth.

The dream work

Freud realized that to interpret a dream—or any other articulations of the unconscious—is to engage in a process like that of the dream itself but moving in the opposite direction. Although the dream moves from thoughts to images it is the task of interpretation to translate the language of images into discursive language. This endeavor, however, presents the difficulty that the so-called dream thoughts—that is to say the material the dream is working on—are twisted when they are transformed into imaginary presentation. In other words, the unconscious not only strives to produce meaning but also in the same process distorts meaning. The dream works not only by *Darstellung* but also by *Entstellung*.

In a footnote to the discussion of the dream work 25 years after the publication of his book, Freud found it necessary to point out the misunderstandings that have been connected to the distinction between the latent and manifest dream.

Readers of Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" (1900b) had to get used to the idea that the dream demands an interpretation. Although this introduced a hermeneutic approach toward understanding the meaning of the dream, it also led to the common misunderstanding that the meaning of the dream is enclosed in the latent signification. This erases the importance and significance of the dream work itself. "At bottom," Freud writes, "dreams are nothing other than a particular *form* of thinking, made possible by the condition of sleep. It is the *dream-work* which creates that form, and

it alone that is the essence of dreaming—the explanation of its peculiar nature” (Freud, 1900b, p. 506; footnote added 1925).

The implications are manifold. First, although the dream work operates by condensation, displacement, and so on, it is not the content of these processes that marks the essence of the dream but the process itself, which consists not only of making meaning but also of distorting meaning.

As French linguist Émile Benveniste (1977) pointed out, Freud decisively elucidated the symbolizing process of the unconscious, which is known to us in the way it shows itself in slips of the tongue, tropes, figures, and displacements whenever the power of censorship is abolished. By studying the symbolizing process of the unconscious Freud realized that here we meet with a kind of language so different from discursive language that it would be preferable to use another designation for it. Not only do we confront a combination of signs we do not recognize from ordinary language but also we realize that in between these signs there exists an intentionality buried in the depths of our psyche. This intentionality takes the form of wishes that find their way to consciousness in the most peculiar forms. Freud, in short, was not so much impressed by what the unconscious speaks of as the ways in which it does so. I shall have more to say about Freud’s idea of how the unconscious speaks when we return to the case of Dora.

Second, Freud discerned that in his style of writing about the dream, the joke, and the hysteric, he had used narrative and autobiographical discourses and that this had not been a conscious choice. On the contrary, he asserted, it was the result of the very object he was studying. Writing about Elisabeth von R, Freud stated that his case stories are like short stories and so lack the serious stamp of science, but he then consoled himself that this was caused not by an inclination on his part but that “the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this” (Freud, 1895, p. 160). In other words, Freud recognized that the subject he was studying forced its way into the written text in ways not always under the control of the writer.

One particular passage from “The Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1900b) stands out as exemplary of Freud’s thinking about how the unconscious unfolds. In Chapter 6 Freud analyzes the syntax of the dream, the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, the representability of the dream, and the secondary revision. To the reader this chapter seems to sum up the author’s view of the production and meaning of the dream. Freud opens Chapter 7, however, by reshuffling the cards once more. He starts by narrating the dream of “the burning child,” using it as an example of a dream that does not need any interpretation. The dream is about a father who has been watching by his son’s deathbed. After the son has died the father rests in an adjoining room. Here he dreams that the boy is standing at his bedside and asking reproachfully whether he cannot see him burning. The father wakes up and realizes that a candle has set fire to the child’s clothes in the next room.

Here Freud introduces a dream that, because it does not demand any interpretation, seems to upset the whole idea of interpretation, linked so strongly to Freud’s understanding of the nature of the dream. The dream and its interpretation is one of the same thing as evidenced by the original German title *Die Traumdeutung* (Freud, 1900a). He even calls the dream of the burning child exemplary, which strikes the reader as rather absurd because the necessity of interpretation is his main focus. Until this point, interpreting the dream has occupied Freud and now he claims that this little dream speaks for itself without any need of interpretation. Then, however, Freud explains why he brings up the dream of the burning child: “It is only after we have disposed of everything that has to do with the work of interpretation that we can begin to realize the incompleteness of our psychology of dreams” (Freud, 1900b, pp. 510–511). Does Freud mean that the effort of interpreting the dream has barred the way to a deeper understanding of the nature of the dream? We do not get an explicit answer to this question, but the argument that follows might point in this direction. Looking back along the paths hitherto taken, Freud calls this “the easy and agreeable portion of our journey.” What lies ahead is an endeavor to penetrate deeper into the mental process involved in dreaming and

this path, he continues, “will end in darkness” (p. 511). Why? Because, he argues, “there is no possibility of *explaining* dreams, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known” (p. 511). At present we have no psychological knowledge we might use as basis for our explanation. Freud then goes on to set up some “fresh hypotheses” about the psychic apparatus and the play of forces operating it.

This passage from “The Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1900b) demonstrates Freud’s method of investigation and his tolerance for not-knowing, which as we shall see contrasts strongly to the position he takes in the Dora case. Freud’s tolerance for not-knowing reaches a sort of climax when after having punctured the work of interpretation he argues that there are passages in even the most thoroughly interpreted dreams that have to be left obscure. He then introduces the strange figure of the “dream’s navel,” the point where the dream-thoughts cannot be unraveled and “where [the dream] reaches down into the unknown” (p. 525). This figure of the dream’s navel contrasts strongly to another metaphor Freud introduces much later. In “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” Freud (1937a) introduces the concept of the “bedrock,” which refers to the irreducible differences between the sexes. Whereas the metaphor of navel of the dream points to an open-ended quest for knowledge, the metaphor of the bedrock seems on the other hand to put a stop to further thinking.

Freud’s magnum opus, “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b), reveals that he is an eminent hermeneutic scholar who demonstrates that dreams have meaning, which it is possible to elucidate. Interpretation, however, is not enough. Quite unlike texts, dreams seem to operate in a different kind of figurative language from that of discursive language; furthermore, this figurative language is motivated by sources unknown to consciousness. Thus, in building up his theory of the dream Freud draws on a deconstructive technique, temporarily suspending the interpretive technique he had used until then in order to introduce some “fresh hypotheses.” He seems, in other words, to make use of an example that brings his interpretive technique to what he himself calls a “stop” (*Haltstelle*) while continuing with what he calls “speculations.” The dream of the burning child stops being what Freud wanted it to be at first: an example, which did not need any interpretation. However, by pointing beyond interpretation Freud opens up a psychological continent cloaked in darkness and disfigures the little dream before our eyes; it is no longer evident but insists that we penetrate into unknown areas. Freud seems to disavow his assumptions and points toward further investigations, which seem to promise more despite the darkness. This is a gesture very typical of Freud, which renders his texts incomplete and gives his thinking and writing an elliptical form. Once more we hear Freud refer to “the nature of the subject” as the motivation for leaving the easy path indicated by the evidence, allowing us the freedom to speculate. In a letter to Fliess, Freud again makes it clear that the style of his writing is in some strange way forced upon him and presents itself in a way with which he is not wholeheartedly satisfied. While waiting for his friend’s critical comments to the dream-book, he sums up his own judgment:

The matter about dreams I believe to be unassailable; what I dislike about it is the style. I was quite unable to express myself with noble simplicity, but lapsed into a facetious, circumlocutory straining after the picturesque. I know that, but the part in me that knows it, and appraises it is unfortunately not the part that is productive [Freud, 1897–1904, p. 297].

In contrast to the hermeneutic technique Freud used in “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b), he takes up quite another position toward his patient in the Dora case. As we shall see, this position has its roots in another movement, which is just as characteristic of Freud, a consequence of his wish to find the historical truth in the patient’s narrative in order to present his science as unassailable, systematic, and complete.

The Dora case

When Freud wrote down his short treatment of his young patient known as Dora in the same year he published “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b), he confronted an obstacle of

a more serious character than the one he met in his studies of what he called *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901). In his work with the dream, the joke, everyday slips of the tongue, and so on, Freud could position himself at a certain comfortable distance from the material he was working with. Likewise he could draw on a method that to a certain degree resembled the hermeneutic interpretation of a text. But as we have already seen with Dora, Freud was forced by the very “nature of the subject” to work in another direction. During his work with the dream it turned out that the effort to uncover a latent layer behind the manifest dream forced him to follow the continuous transformative movement of the unconscious in its aim to reach consciousness. The necessary speculative theorizing about a psychological apparatus that could make the dream work explicable took a turn that Freud did not always feel easy about as he realized that the case, so to speak, wrote its own signature into Freud’s text.

The blow of narcissistic violation that Freud experienced when writing about the normal phenomena of psychic life turned out to be nothing compared with the kind of violation he met with in the transference of his clinical work.

The phenomena of transference and countertransference have elicited innumerable critical comments. The critiques have focused on Freud’s technical mistakes, his inability to see the transference and not least his own countertransference; his unrealized identification with Dora’s hysteria and the priority of his own ambition and desire at the expense of his patient’s wish for help. This is not the place to go into the numerous readings and critical comments about Freud’s Dora (see Bernheimer and Kahane, 1985; Mahoney, 1996; Lichtenberg, 2005). Scholars and analysts have read Dora as an exposé of transference and countertransference (Lacan, 1953–1954, 1985; Rose, 1985; Verhaeghe, 1999), as expression of Freud’s desire (Cottet, 2012), whereas Jacqueline Rose with reference to Lacan has ventured the idea that Freud mistook the whole concept of desire, turning it instead into a demand launched at the analyst. I shall return to this point.

From a literary point of view the story of Dora has been read as a piece of Victorian family drama, thematically and stylistically in line with Ibsen’s “contemporary dramas” (Hertz, 1985; Marcus, 1985; Moi, 1985; Weissberg, 2005). Finally, Dora has been critiqued from a feminist perspective as victim of patriarchal phallogocentric culture and of Freud’s epistemological desire for phallic omnipotence (Mitchell, 1982; Moi, 1985; Ramas, 1985; Rose, 1985). The many critiques testify to the challenge Freud’s unaccomplished treatment posed to the readers of his case story.

It is a common experience from daily psychoanalytic work that our understanding seldom presents itself immediately but has to wait until further reflections have *nachträglich* (deferred) elucidated the material we noticed—to be sure—during a session, although we did not manage to put this into words. It took Freud many years to fully understand the depths of the case story he wrote down in 1900 just after Dora had left but published 5 years later.

That Freud, however, was marked by his work with Dora long after she had broken off treatment is evident in his many slips of the pen regarding this sequence. Thus, he dated the treatment a year earlier (1899) than it took place when he wrote down or rewrote the story in 1900, and he repeated this mistake in January 1901 and again in 1914 and 1923. A slip of the pen tells us that although Dora was finished with Freud, the opposite was not the case. We might also assume that Freud wished to be only partly conscious of placing the Dora case a year before “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b) so to conceal the fragmented and unfinished character this case story had—much to his annoyance.

Likewise Freud revealed during the sessions his struggle to prove himself the *conquistador* he claimed to be. However, it is not difficult to recognize that behind the dogmatic security—behind the master discourse—hides a disturbing insecurity that points to Freud not only as the narrator of the story but also as an active participant.

The ambiguities in the text are conspicuous in the many contradictory reflections concerning the question of whether the story has a character of fragment or wholeness. With compulsive insistence, Mahoney (2005) has observed, Freud, more than 20 times, lamented the loss of his authorial control.

Although the title points to a certain humility, Freud reveals in other passages an ambition for the opposite, toward a complete and perfect presentation. “It is only because the analysis was prematurely broken off that we have been obliged in Dora’s case to resort to framing conjectures and filling in deficiencies” (Freud, 1905a, p. 85). In another passage we encounter the same conviction: “If the work had been continued we should no doubt have obtained the fullest possible enlightenment upon every particular of the case” (p. 12).

Now, Freud’s text is in a certain sense fragmentary, but considering the extreme complexity of this fragment, the completeness Freud refers to seems both unthinkable and unreachable. Therefore we must ask ourselves how to understand this obsession with the question of fragment versus wholeness. Freud himself has pointed to his limited insight at the time of the treatment. He did not manage to handle the transference in due time, and something went wrong in his relation to the patient. In all probability it went wrong not only because he was blind to Dora’s transference but also because his insight into himself had its limits, which he tried to master by writing down the story. It is thus we must interpret the fact that Freud chose to write down such a problematic case story (Marcus, 1985). Freud was endeavoring to fill out the holes, striving toward completeness because he had encountered the limits of his self-knowledge. The text bears traces hereof and for this reason it is instructive to his readers. Mahoney (2005) has expressed it straight out, saying that Freud emerged from the case “symbolic castrated and he wrote a symbolic castrated text” (p. 38).

Freud’s dogmatism and his insistence on the master discourse, secure in its own judgment, peaks in his description of Dora’s oedipal love. Dora’s problems manifest themselves against the background of a familiar power structure in which women are circulated—a circulation, which Dora resists—as objects of masculine desire. Dora’s father has entered a relationship with Mrs. K, a woman of the family’s acquaintance, whose husband on the other hand makes advances to the very young Dora. Dora for her part has rejected Mr. K’s advances while accepting his presents and other kinds of considerateness. In the wake of her refusal, Dora’s father takes her to Freud with the explicit wish that he bring the girl to her senses: in other words that he make her submit to the patriarchal order.

Notwithstanding Freud’s acknowledgment of Dora’s version of the story, his description of Dora’s reaction to the sexual advances reveals that his understanding of the question of women’s desire is limited by the very same masculine perspective: “I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable” (Freud, 1905a, p. 28). We detect neither hesitation nor insecurity in Freud’s statement about what constitutes a normal sexual reaction in a young woman. At the same time he is obviously uncertain about where he may place Dora developmentally, calling her at once a girl and a child while at the same time ascribing to her the ability to react sexually as an adult woman. There can be many reasons for this confusion: Freud’s cultural background combined with his experience and knowledge. However, throughout the whole treatment and in spite of Dora’s protests, Freud insists on her oedipal love for Mr. K and on interpreting Dora’s symptoms as the expression of repressed sexual wishes. In his text from 1933 on “Femininity” Freud returns once more to the question of femininity and the enigma that the female presents, and he admits that what he may add is utterly fragmented and incomplete and not even very kind and he requests that the reader look up more knowledge either in literature or in his own experiences. Instead of opening his eye to female desire Freud writes this desire out of his text, places it in a footnote, and calls it a “homosexual” (gynecophilic) love for Mrs. K.

Gone is the investigative attitude and skeptical position toward absolute knowledge we met in the dream book. There are, however, exceptions. When Freud analyzes Dora’s two dreams he engages in more open-minded curiosity toward the psychic material at hand. But even when Freud is most eager to demonstrate his mastery of the technique of interpretation, the insistent character of unconscious communication is unmistakable in his discourse.

Let us examine just one passage to demonstrate Freud’s master discourse. During the work of reconstructing the origin of Dora’s nervous cough a dialogue takes place that makes it unclear to the

reader whose knowledge and fantasy are put into words. Dora accuses Mrs. K of loving her father because he was a *vermögende Mann*—a wealthy man. Due to some “incidental circumstances” that Freud chooses to pass over, he reads the opposite into Dora’s sentence: that the father is an *unvermögende Mann*, which could only be meant in a sexual way. Dora seems to accept this interpretation and when Freud points out the contradiction between her talking about an ordinary sexual relationship between Mrs. K and the father and insisting at the same time that the father is impotent, Dora’s answer reveals that she knows other ways of reaching sexual satisfaction. It is, however, not Dora but Freud who introduces the idea of “sexual gratification *per os*.” Speaking in the voice of the master he concludes that it is inevitable that with her spasmodic cough, which, as is usual, was referred for its exciting stimulus to a tickling in her throat, she pictured to herself a scene of sexual gratification *per os* between the two people whose love affair occupied her mind so incessantly (Freud, 1905a, p. 48).

According to Freud, Dora tacitly accepts the interpretation and after a short time her cough disappears, “which fitted well with my view.” As a gesture from a man feeling sure of the “inevitable conclusion” he has drawn, however, he freely admits that he does not “lay too much stress upon this development since the cough had so often disappeared spontaneously” (Freud, 1905a).

There are several things at stake in this passage. To the hypothetical question of how one ought to speak with young women, Freud has chosen a “dry” and “direct” phrase. But then we witness what at first might seem to be Freud’s slip of the tongue when he makes evasive use of a foreign language when talking about sexual matters. Thus he explicitly wants to distance himself from the prurience with which such topics are spoken of “in society” while he prefers to call bodily organs by their technical names: “*J’appelle un chat un chat*” (Freud, 1905a, p. 48). Referring to the indignation shown in some circles about speaking of sexual matters with young women, he points out that “*pour faire une omelette il faut casser des oeufs*” (Freud, 1905a, p. 49). We may read this as an expression of the resistance to which Freud himself succumbs when it comes to fantasies of the sexual. Language, thus, offers its own displacement and we recognize a libidinalized subtext where French is added to an otherwise technical discourse.

As the story about Dora unfolds, it becomes clear to the reader that it is more about Freud himself than about his patient. What Freud presents as Dora’s repressed drive impulses is chiefly based on identification. Freud understands Dora’s messages through his own associations, which lead him to read the hysteric’s body language as the expression of repressed sexual wishes. In the words of Sachs (2005) we may say that “Dora did not provide a window to her unconscious but rather that she presented a mirror reflecting an image that [Freud] did not recognize as, in large part his own” (p. 48). We must, however, also give Freud the credit that he succeeded in deciphering the hysteric’s body language through his very identification with Dora or rather by identifying himself with Dora’s hysteria while we at the same time may ask if his deciphering was exhaustive. Freud had his own doubts about this.

As he writes toward the end of the case story, however, “No one who, like me, conjures up the most evil of those half-tamed demons that inhabit the human breast and seeks to wrestle with them, can expect to come through the struggle unscathed” (Freud, 1905a, p. 109). Here we stumble upon one of those considerations so typical of Freud, when insisting on scientific trustworthiness he persists in uncovering every possible hint of hidden motives. In his treatment of Dora, however, he is never clear when it comes to his own part in the treatment and his narration. Even if he was dimly aware of Dora’s transference, he had not yet recognized, by comparison, his own countertransference. Nonetheless it is clear to the meticulous reader how and how often Freud’s own demons are active when he forces his way into “the finer structure of a neurosis” (p. 12).

The most important source of Freud’s countertransference is probably—as has been pointed out by many readers of this text—to be found in his defensive struggle to handle his identification with his patient’s femininity. Like Hertz (1985), Toril Moi (1985) reads Freud’s text as a masculine protest against his own femininity while Jacqueline Rose (1985) takes a much broader view on the question of why Freud failed with the Dora case. This failure cannot be located to any single issue in the

Freudian text. The problems of femininity cannot, Rose argues, be solved without showing how it relates to the concept of sexuality to the concept of the unconscious and its relation to representation. I cannot go into the details of this important text. I only point to how Rose, by discussing these interrelated subjects, ends up by proposing vis à vis the Dora case that instead of talking of sexuality as content it should be defined in the register of demand and desire and that the answer to Freud's inability to guess what Dora wanted from him is that desire cannot be answered, it can only be presented as a question and an enigma. Thus the whole question of femininity evolves around this question of desire and it was precisely this question that could not be answered within the Freudian master discourse.

In "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900b) Freud spoke from the position of not-knowing, resulting in a huge amount of material he put into the text and which therefore forced him to admit that his style of writing had an element of foreignness. In the Dora case he spoke from the position of certainty, positioning himself as the one who knows and who therefore has the privilege to choose what to leave out from the material and what to take into the written text. First of all he demonstrated his knowledge of how to understand the patient's dream and especially her sexuality, which he alone had the courage to bring out in the open. As we have seen, Freud had absolutely no doubt about the oedipal foundation of his patient's hysterical symptoms.

In his reading of Freud's Dora, Lacan (1985) has shown that Freud was limited by his prejudiced idea of the Oedipus complex, which he considered natural rather than normative. Instead of open-mindedly examining the patient's sexual impulses, Freud brought his own ego on the scene and in this way created his own kind of resistance against recognizing the patient's sexuality. "It is absolutely obvious that Freud brings into play his *ego*, the conception he himself has of what girls are made for—a girl is made to love boys" (Lacan, 1985, p. 184).

Lacan (1985) draws out a figure in Freud's thinking, which will turn out to present a continuous barrier to Freud's attempt to bring the sexual relation and especially female desire to a solution that is not limited by the masculine perspective. As Rose (1985) has formulated it, Freud's interpretation of Dora is based on "a simple identification of the Oedipal triangle ... leaving Dora's own desire ... as unproblematic—heterosexual and genital" (p. 132). We have more to say about this later on.

From reconstruction to construction

Turning briefly to "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (Freud, 1905b) published in the same year as the Dora case, we may find the answer to Freud's insistence on oedipal transference in the Dora case. In his dream book, Freud introduced the tale of Oedipus and proposed to understand it as the poetic rewriting of the early sexual attraction between parents and their children. He returns to the subject in the Dora case and then takes it up again toward the end of "Three Essays," underlining the aftereffect of infantile object-choice while at the same time pointing to the importance of fantasy. It is in the world of ideas "that the choice of an object is accomplished at first; and the sexual life ... is almost entirely restricted to indulging in phantasies." And these fantasies, Freud continues "are as a rule already differentiated owing to the attraction of the opposite sex—the son being drawn towards his mother, and the daughter towards her father" (Freud, 1905b, pp. 226–227).

In the Dora case Freud makes all his patient's fantasies converge on the incestuous love for her father, which Mr. K inherits. He found in these observations of the child's incestuous fantasies and object choices the solution to the riddle of the trauma theory, which had come to a dead end in his studies of hysteria. The Oedipus complex thus paved the way for an alternative explanation of hysteria to that of traumatic seduction, which he put forward in "Studies on Hysteria" (1895). Traumatic seduction was no longer a question of reality but of fantasy, taking the form of fantasied sexual scenes, which constitute the place of origin of hysteria.

However, although Freud proclaimed the Oedipus complex as the “kernel complex of neuroses” as early as his “Three Essays” (1905b), it is not until 1923 that he assigns it a fundamental function in his essay “The Infantile Genital Organisation.” In short, his idea is that the boy fears the father and castration as paternal punishment for his forbidden desire for his mother. The girl on the other hand develops penis envy, looking to the father to compensate for her lack and turning the wished-for partial object into a wish for a child. The possibility of castration stands out as fateful to both. In the psychoanalytic theory, however, the concept of castration came to mean an impasse both when applied to the feminine Oedipus complex and to the question of what it is that leads analysis to a successful outcome.

In “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” Freud (1937a) introduced the metaphor of the bedrock and proclaimed it to be barrier to analytical progress. “We often have the impression that with the wish for a penis and the masculine protest we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached the bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end” (p. 252). Thus we see a straight line of thought from the Dora case and the “Three Essays” (1905b) to “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”; it is the Oedipus complex that binds them together and paves the way for the pessimistic attitude, which may be read in Freud’s last text on the analytic technique. The metaphor of the bedrock gathers these threads as a condensed figure.

In contrast to the pessimistic tones from “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937a), Freud ventures a far more optimistic tone in “Constructions in Analysis” from the same year (1937b). At the level of technique the term *construction* signals a move away from the archaeological metaphor, which he used frequently to describe the analytic work, toward a strategy of investigation beyond hermeneutics toward the deconstructive/constructive. Thus, we find in the two articles published in the same year a contradictory view as to whether analysis has a final cause or on the contrary must satisfy itself with plausible constructions.

In contrast to the line we have drawn from the Dora case to “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937a), which has its fulcrum in the Oedipus complex and together with the metaphor of the bedrock led Freud astray, the text of “Constructions” (1937b) points back to “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b). Here the metaphor of the navel of the dream expresses a different track in Freud’s thinking, as we have seen, which is tolerant of not-knowing and of the interminable character of analytic interpretations. In other words, we recognize the pioneer from the early years, who was willing to renounce the master discourse for the sake of truth, a truth, that is, which must not be seen as identical to reality.

Freud proposes to replace the term *interpretation* with that of construction, thus pointing back to the recognition he had while working with dreams that interpretation is not enough. In “Constructions” (1937b) his argument for replacement runs as follows:

Interpretation applies to something that one does to some single element of the material, such as an association or a parapraxis, but it is a “construction” when one lays before the subject of the analysis a piece of his early history he has forgotten [p. 261].

Thus, a construction is an auxiliary remedy that in the analytic situation is presented to the patient as a substitute for the missing historical real. This construction, Freud vehemently repeats, is only effective because “it recovers a fragment of lost experience” (Freud, 1937b, p. 268).

As we have seen, Freud here follows a line of thinking, which he introduced in “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b). The dream cannot solely be understood as the creation of meaning. Indeed it dissolves meaning in its path toward image formation, and the process of interpreting these continuous transformations from the unconscious to consciousness is fundamentally interminable.

Conclusion

The story of Dora is the only full case story Freud wrote that had a female protagonist. At the time when Dora’s father handed over his daughter to Freud with the slightly hidden motive that Freud might be able to make his daughter submit to the patriarchal order, Freud had brought his science to

a considerable culmination. In collaboration with Breuer Freud had created a theory of hysteria, which allowed this suffering to be understood psychologically, a suffering that had a certain affinity with femininity and which doctors through centuries had tried to understand and cure. With his magnum opus “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b) Freud had demonstrated to himself and to the world that he had found the key to the enigmatic language of the dream. At that time he saw himself as the one who had finally solved the riddle of the hysteric body language and learned to interpret the pictorial script of the dream. No wonder Freud felt rather enthusiastic when his young patient arrived with two dreams, thereby offering Freud the opportunity to bring together his work on hysteria with that on the dream. So it is not strange that in the Dora case Freud speaks from the position of the master discourse. But something went wrong. He miscalculated, failing to see that he did not have at his disposal the key to female desire. Moreover he refused to follow the track his young analysand made so clear in words as well as in her last dream, a track that did not harmonize with the oedipal narrative, which Freud considered the foundation of the relation between the sexes. Although Freud insisted on Dora’s oedipal love for Mr. K, he turned a blind eye on the young woman’s effort to take possession of her own desire taking Mrs. K as her role model.

It is this master discourse, which during his treatment of Dora prevented Freud from tolerating the not-knowing, demonstrated in his “Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b). It is in this text that we in this context found in the beautiful metaphor of the navel of the dream as the place where the whole work of interpretation gets lost in the unknown.

An important element in Freud’s master discourse is his dogmatic conviction that the Oedipus complex is the core concept in psychoanalytic theory and in the development of the two sexes. The Oedipus complex contains the a priori assumption that girls are created to love boys, as Lacan (1985) has said. This assumption impedes Freud’s effort to follow Dora’s desire, which focuses not on the man but on the woman, with the aim of taking possession of and defining her own desire through an identification with a female model. Freud’s resistance has been seen as a defense of his own femininity, and it is this resistance and the dogmatic insistence on the oedipal core in any love relation that leads to Dora’s exit. It is the same limited recognition that many years later led Freud to introduce the metaphor of the bedrock, which might be read as the final sealing of the oedipal myth and the absolutism of Freud’s idea that girls are supposed to love boys.

In Freud’s important last text about the analytic cure “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937a) we observe both attitudes that Freud took toward the object of his work throughout all his writings. We find the infinity perspective in “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900b) and Freud’s observation that in every interpretation we reach a point where interpretation comes to a stop. This is the navel of the dream and the place where it is fastened to the unknown. In other words, there is no absolute limit to our work of interpretation.

When it comes to the question of the relation between the sexes, Freud favored the finite perspective, arguing that here we encounter an absolute limit to our exploration and proclaiming biology to be this limit. The idea of the bedrock may thus be read as a consequence of his resistance toward recognizing a specific female desire, which does not let itself be defined in an analogy to the desire Freud ascribed to the male. Freud was unable—because of his resistance toward his own femininity—to support the young Dora in her attempt to take possession of her desire. This resistance to an understanding of the nuances and differences between the desires of the two sexes has been understood in the light of the master discourse we have read into Freud’s treatment of Dora. We have proposed to link the case of Dora with the metaphor of the bedrock understood as an unsurpassable barrier to both the analytical work and to the theory of the two sexes, which, so to speak, are wrecked at this point.

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